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America

THE NISSAN STUDENT TRAVEL GUIDE

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Jimmy Buffett Searches for Paradise. And We List Six Tropical Hideouts Perfect for Students On a Budget.

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Jimmy Buffett, songwriter in paradise.

MARGARITAVILLE

A PLACE IN THE SHADE

by Jimmy Buffett

My fantasy has always been to find that perfect laid-back town by the ocean, the kind of place where the locals are all legendary characters who spend their days mixing up margaritas, where the air is always warm, and where the sea is crystal-clear—a real Margaritaville of the mind.

There'd have to be a bar right on the beach complete with ceiling fans and cigarette smoke—a bar like the one in the movie *To Have and Have Not*. Hoagy Carmichael would play the piano while Lauren Bacall sang. Humphrey Bogart would be sitting alone at the end of the bar, just taking it all in.

I've been looking for a town like that, a real Margaritaville, for years now—maybe ever since I was a kid and my grandfather, who was a sea captain, explained to me that you could trace a line on a map from our home near Mobile Bay, Alabama, across the ocean and wind up at some of the most exotic places on earth.

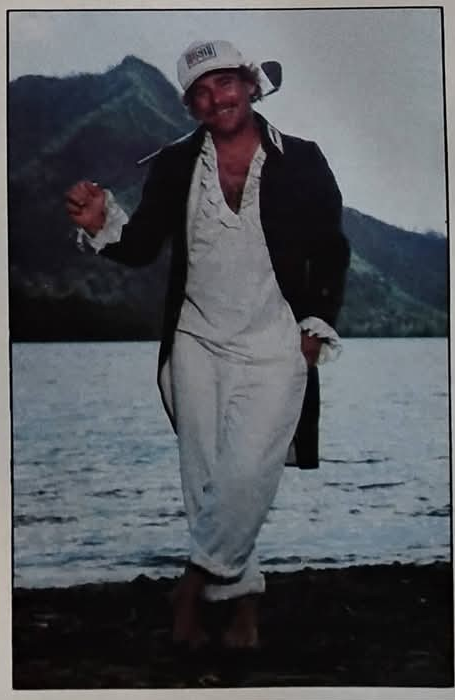
Later on I majored in history at the University of Alabama, and I became fascinated by the history of the Caribbean. By then my mental image of Margaritaville had grown more complex. I took elements from books like Herman Wouk's *Don't Stop the Carnival,* which is about a New York public-relations man who buys a bar on a fictitious tropical island. Then there were movies like *Donovan's Reef* and the TV series *Adventures in Paradise,* which really influenced me at a young age.

It all blended together like tequila, salt, and limes: Margaritaville became a combination of the romance of the ocean, the romance of history, and my impressions of a few of the places I'd been. There's a town down in Mexico, for instance, called Puerto Morales; it's a real Mexican fishing village located about 20 miles south of Cancun. And then there's a place called the Rosario Beach Hotel, 45 minutes south of San Diego, where you can get good lobster with diablo sauce and a margarita. That hotel is the closest, neatest getaway I've found.

Back when I knew it in 1971, Key West used to be a lot like Margaritaville; it was a place designed for complete escapism. Around that time I was running from a bad marriage and bad weather, and I had to get back to the ocean. The line in my *Volcano* album—"I shot six holes in my freezer, I think I got cabin fever,"*—well, that's real life. I did that once: plugged my refrigerator. And then I thought, Jimmy, you better get yourself to the ocean, boy.

Well, I lived in Key West for three years, and mostly all I did was hang out in the bars. Then I got a boat, and that opened up another whole aspect, just like it did for my grandfather. Most of the people I knew in Key West seven or eight years ago aren't there anymore. All that's left are the legends, so it's not that comfortable for me. But then Margaritaville is a place you have to keep looking for.

One of the worst investments I ever made was buying a bar, something like the one in *To Have and Have Not*. It's the only American bar on the Caribbean island of St. Barthélémy. I've done everything there from peeling onions to mixing drinks. It's the biggest damn financial nightmare—a great, dumb, stupid, wonderful thing to own—I've yet to see a dime come out of it, but I bought it truly for no other reason than to sit on a stool and tell whoever I'm talking to that I own part of a bar in the Caribbean. Now, I try to explain to the accountants that the stories I'll get out of that place are worth more than any monetary gain. I doubt they understand.



JIM SHEA

The point is, I lived out a fantasy. It may be everyone's fantasy, but I'm sure glad not everyone lives it out. It wouldn't be quite as exotic then. I love being the guy who gets to tell people about it.

I really love to tour the Midwest in nasty weather, say in February and March. We set up palm trees on stage and project pictures of boats and ocean scenes. People show up in Bermuda shorts and Hawaiian shirts, and for a couple of hours I try to take them to Margaritaville. And it's possible, because Margaritaville is as much a state of mind as a place.

Michael Nesmith [remember the Monkee who wore a ski cap?] told me a story that illustrates that point: He was in the Baja race, and somewhere in the middle of that huge desert his car broke down. Way out there in the middle of nowhere he ran into an expatriate American—the sort of guy who could be anywhere between the ages of 25 and 45. This guy had a solar panel connected to a Sears Diehard battery; all week long he'd collect juice from the sun. Then on weekends his friends would come over and boogie. They'd connect the battery to a blender and make margaritas; they'd hook it up to an old tape player and play their one copy of *Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes*. And they were in Margaritaville, out there in the middle of the burning desert.

Right now I'm working on a movie version of Margaritaville. It's great; I get to construct a perfect Margaritaville. The island in the film is a cross section of all the neat old places I've visited, and the inhabitants are the characters in my songs. I'm even using the guy with the solar panels—the 12-volt man. It'll be a new genre: the coconut musical comedy.

Maybe it'll be the ultimate place to go for spring break. Maybe the movie will affect people the way *Adventures in Paradise* affected me. That series changed my life. It made me want to get the hell away from Mobile, Alabama; it got me started on my search for Margaritaville.

This article is based on a taped conversation with outdoor writer Tim Cahill.

*From the song "Boat Drinks," lyrics and music by Jimmy Buffet, ©1979 Coral Reefer Music, BMI.